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# CIA no threat to liberty, but clearer definition needed

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The CIA is not a threat to our liberties and never has been. It is composed of dedicated officers of extremely high standards of integrity and patriotism. Should anyone attempt to subvert the agency to purposes that would threaten our society, it would be members of CIA who would be the first to sound the alarm.

But the real problem of CIA, the inherent tension in conducting secret intelligence in a free society, remains.

Allen Dulles justifies secret intelligence gathering activities—espionage and the use of devices such as the U2—on the grounds of national survival. The Communists are avowedly out to “bury” us, and they make extensive military preparations in the utmost of secrecy. These facts alone, Dulles argues, justify our taking the measures necessary to uncover those preparations.

Dulles justifies our covert political activities on similar grounds. As long as the Communist countries continue to use subversive means to bring down non-Communist regimes, those who oppose the Communists must be prepared to meet the threat. But meeting it successfully, Dulles argues, means that our intelligence services must play their role early in the struggle, while the subversion is still in the plotting and organizational stage.

“To act,” Dulles writes, “one must have the intelligence about the plot and the plotter and have ready the technical means, overt and covert, to meet it.”

Citing the Truman and Eisenhower doctrines, which laid down policies that the United States would come to the aid of countries threatened by communism whose governments requested help, Dulles goes on to enunciate a doctrine of his own.

He argues that covert political action should be used to foil Communist attempts to take over a country with or without a request for help.

*The real problem of the CIA, the inherent tensions in conducting secret intelligence in a free society, is explained by Roger Hilsman in this excerpt from his book, “To Move a Nation.” He writes that Allen Dulles’ justification of the CIA’s methods is fundamentally right. This is the sixth of eight installments from Hilsman’s book appearing in the Ledger-Star. Hilsman was an undersecretary of state in the Kennedy administration.*

“In Iran a Mossadegh and in Guatemala an Arbenz came to power through the usual processes of government,” he writes, “and not by any Communist coup as in Czechoslovakia. Neither man at the time disclosed the intention of creating a Communist state. When this purpose became clear, support from outside was given to loyal anti-Communist elements in the respective countries. . . . In each case the danger was successfully met. There again no invitation was extended by the government in power for outside help.”

In both these arguments, it seems to me, Dulles is fundamentally right. So long as the Communists themselves are openly antagonistic to the rest of the world, as they openly and avowedly are, and so long as they use the techniques of subversion to bring down governments, which they do and which

they openly and avowedly advocate doing, then the countries to which they are so hostile have both a right and a duty to use the methods of secret intelligence to protect and defend themselves—where those methods are effective and appropriate and for which there is no effective and appropriate alternative.

The trouble has been, of course, that these qualifications have not always been observed. In the past we have too often used secret intelligence methods when they were not effective and appropriate or when there were effective and appropriate alternatives. In particular became a fact,

the answer to every kind of problem, and American agents became as ubiquitously busy as the Communists.

But covert action was really nothing more than a gimmick. In very special circumstances, it was a useful supplement, but nothing more.

It is one thing, for example, to help the shah’s supporters in Iran in their struggle against Mossadegh and his Communist allies, but it is something else again to sponsor a 1,000-man invasion against Fidel Castro’s Cuba, where there was no effective internal opposition. It is one thing, again, to give a covert boost to, say, the Philippines’ Magsaysay, a natural leader with wide popular support, in a bid for power in the midst of Hukbalahaps, and it is something quite different to try to create a Magsaysay by covert efforts, as we did in the 1950s with Gen. Phoumi Nosavan in Laos.

But it was some time before these distinctions became clear. Covert action was over-used as an instrument of foreign policy, and the reputation of the United States suffered more and more. “Covert” is usually defined not as completely secret, but as “plausibly deniable.” But while one action might be “plausibly deniable,” several hundred are not. And where one action, considered in isolation, might seem worth the cost of slightly tarnishing our image abroad, the cumulative effort of several hundred blots was to blacken it entirely.

By the end of the Eisenhower administration our reputation was such that we got credit for everything unpleasant that happened in many countries, whether we were actually responsible. In Southeast Asia, for example, there was hardly a single country in which it was not widely believed that the CIA had been behind some major event. Even in France, our oldest ally and friend since it helped us in the Revolutionary War, newspapers published the charge that the CIA supported the OAS generals in their attempted coup in 1961 against President Charles de Gaulle—and Frenchmen believed it.

And again in 1965, when the French government protested that an American photo-reconnaissance plane had flown over French atomic energy installations, French newspapers charged that it had been sent there deliberately on an intelligence mission, just as the U2 had been sent over the Soviet Union—and Frenchmen believed it. Too heavy reliance on the techniques of secret intelligence, in sum, so corroded one of our major political assets, the belief in American intentions and integrity, as to nullify much of the gain.

But if it is granted that the United States has both a right and a duty to use the methods of secret intelligence to defend itself against an avowedly hostile Communist power, there are some advantages to having the kind of centralized intelligence setup which CIA represents. Without this centralization, for example, there would be continuous disasters in the field of clandestine collection activities.

Competing intelligence services would inevitably stumble over each other with ridiculous and dangerous consequences. Without this centralization, intelligence priorities would be developed by each individual service and department, instead of by the whole of the United States government, which permits a rational measuring of costs as against gain not only in monetary but also in political terms.

Finally, without this centralization, the CIA would not have been able to bring about the truly national intelligence estimates that it has, especially on the big questions of Soviet missile and nuclear strength, the Sino-Soviet dispute, and Communist intentions, and probable reactions, in which all the different services and departments have educated each other. And the alternative has been competing estimates that would have torn policy asunder.